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ABSTRACT

A project to develop English reading texts for Japanese college students is described. Goals were to develop materials that will: (1) give students information about the United States, (2) interest students in reading English, (3) help students improve their reading skills, and (4) expose students to a variety of literary forms. Fifty important and/or interesting areas of culture or life in the United States that were incorporated in the materials are identified. In addition to selections that explain cultural information directly, the selections used various literary forms, such as dialogues, directions, newspaper articles, poems, a letter, and a movie scenario. Additional literary froms that were used are identified. Types of realia included in the materials, such as recipes, advertisements, and brochures, are also indicated. Besides having students read each passage at least three times in the class, the text was designed to have students do work related to the passage with exercises to gain more cultural meaning. It is suggested that visual aids help students better understand the main text, and that photographs, realia and maps made reading selections more real to students. Other learning activities include experience-based activities (e.g., making foods from English recipes), role playing, and writing exercises. Attention is directed to feedback on the materials from students and teachers, benefits of teaching culture, and previous studies on how well Japanese people understand American culture and how well they are taught about American culture in English courses. (SW)

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Developing Reading Materials for Teaching American Culture in English Courses

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Introduction

The purpose of language is communication. Full communication cannot be accomplished without understanding the cultural background of the language, even if language is manipulated well.

Knowing other cultures and experiencing them improves communication with the people who have those cultural backgrounds. Culture affects communication indirectly through association. When people of the same culture communicate, they are able to communicate accurately and with relatively few words because of their shared associations. However, people of different cultures may not have shared associations (and may not even realize that they do not) and so may have difficulty communicating. Culture limits the content of communication. Culture determines levels of communication, that is, how much speakers reveal of themselves. The ways of communication vary according to cultures. Culture also relates to other means of communication, such as physical contact, time, place, human relations and sex, therefore, communicating with people of different cultural backgrounds effectively without knowing their covert communication systems is very difficult. Moreover, the Japanese have a disadvantage in intercultural communication because they are homogeneous in terms of race, culture and language. Although with compatriots they can commu-

nicate well even in silence, they are not used to intercultural communication and do not distinguish it from their own.[1]

Since economic, academic and cultural relations with the United States are increasing, the cultural aspects of the English language are becoming more and more important to Japan. As Japanese people encounter American people, information, and culture more frequently than ever before, more misunderstanding and miscommunication occur.

Previous Studies

In the English teaching profession in Japan, American culture has been empasized recently because of the stress on communication. However, it is taught neither extensively nor well. There are not many studies to show how culture is important and how well it is taught in English classes. My colleagues and I have not found any guidelines for developing reading materials for teaching American culture in Japan.

I conducted four studies using surveys, examination of English textbooks, a test, and interviews in order to find out how well Japanese people understand American culture and how well they are taught about American culture in English courses.

I administered a survey to forty Japanese students at the University of Kansas. The results showed that there is an inadequate foundation for good understanding and communication between the Americans and Japanese. The Japanese students had been taught very little about American culture in English courses of any level, so their understanding of American culture was quite limited. As a result they had some problems understan-

1) Kenji Kitao, "Difficulty of Intercultural Communication-Between Americans and Jaoanese--," *Doshisha Literature*, No. 29 (December, 1979), pp.155—169.
Reprinted in *NALLD Journal : Technology & Mediated Instruction*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Winter, 1980), pp.22—30.
Reprinted in *Yearbook of English Teaching in Japan 1980*, Tokyo : Kaitakusha (November, 1980), pp. 151—150.
ERIC document ED 191 328

ding Americans and communicating with them. This study indicated that American culture, particularly culture with a small "c," should be emphasized more in English courses at all levels.[2]

The similar survey was given to thirty-one Japanese high school students in the United States. The results showed that little about American culture is taught in English classes in Japan, and this prevents Japanese from communicating adequately with Americans.[3]

I reviewed some articles on culture in junior and senior high school textbooks and analyzed some high school textbooks myself. The results showed that textbooks are linguistically oriented and not culturally oriented. Most of the textbooks do not have any units to describe the United States and its people or culture directly. They contain only a little American culture in just a few units. They lack some important items of American culture. Even the little cultural information that is given is not always described accurately. As a result, junior and senior highschool textbooks contain little about Culture with a big "C," culture with a small "c," practical information, or the convert culture of American people and they do not present American culture well.[4]

I administered the *Test of American Culture*, which has 100 multiple choice questions, to 200 Japanese students, of whom 40 were in the United States. The results showed that Japanese students understand American cultural items much less than Americans do. The ten most difficult areas of American culture included such areas as newspapers, TV and movies,

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2) _____, "A Survey of the Teaching of American Culture with K.U. Japanese Students," *Doshisha Studies in English*, No. 19 (August, 1978), pp.153—174.
ERIC document ED 179 097

3) _____, "Japanese Exchange Students' Evaluation of English Teaching in apan," *Doshisha Studies in English*, No. 25 (October, 1980), pp.121—141.
ERIC document 202 211

4) _____, "The Present Situation in the Teaching of American Culture in English Courses in Japan-Analysis of Junior and Senior High School English Textbooks in Japan," *Doshisha Studies in English*, No. 21 (March, 1979), pp.90—150.
ERIC document ED 179 098

time, transportation, economy, postage, telephone, table settings, magazines, and religion. Generally, covert culture was most difficult to understand, followed by culture with a small "c," and practical information for living or traveling in the United States. The easiest to understand was Culture with a capital "C."[5]

Following up the *Test of American Culture*, I interviewedt wenty newly arrived Japanese at the University of Kansas. The results showed that they were seriously lacking in practical information. This type of trouble is due to the differences in the social systems of Japan and the United States. They did know much about American social customs, the levels of formality, and American valne systems.[6]

In conclusion, the results of the four studies show that the Japanese students had been taught very little about American culture in English courses of any level and they did not understand American culture well. As a result, they had problems understanding Americans and communicating with them.

Benefits of Teaching Culture

Basides contributing to understanding language, intercultural communication, and international understanding, teaching culture has some by-products that are very beneficial in foreign-language instruction. The following are some of the by-products.

1. The teaching of culture gives students a reason to study the lang-

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5) _____, "The Test of American Culture," *Doshisha Studies in English*, No. 22 (October, 1979), pp.102—129.
Reprinted in *NALLD Journal : Technology & Mediated Instruction*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Winter, 1981), pp.25—44.
Reprinted in *Communication : The Journal of the Communication Association of the Pacific*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (October, 1981), pp.9—29.
ERIC document ED 191 331

6) _____, "The Teaching of American Culture in English Courses in Japan," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (Lawrence, Kansas : The University of Kansas, 1977), pp.202—249.

uage. An understanding of culture makes language study more meaningful. Many students take foreign language courses because they are required. They do not know why they are studying foreign languages. Culture study can supply a reason.

2. The teaching of culture makes languag more alive and makes things more real. It helps students to relate the abstract sounds and forms of a foreign language to real people and places. It helps students understand the language better.
3. The teaching of culture increases student curiosity and interest. Students like to learn about other cultures and do culturally based activities, such as singing, dancing, role playing, mini-drama, doing research on target countries, people and cultures, and so forth.
4. The first three benefits strongly motivate students to go on to further language study. This type of motivation has been proved very strong. The teaching of culture is also useful for quick motivation when students are dull in the classroom.
5. The teaching of culture helps students understand not only other cultures but also their own cultures better.
6. The teaching of culture gives students positive attitudes toward people of a different language and culture.
7. The teaching of culture contributes to an all-round education.

College Reading Materials Research Project[7]

My colleagues and I started to develop English reading texts for Japanese college students with a Japan Association of Language Teachers(JALT) research grant in December, 1979, and continued with another JALT research grant in November, 1980. Our goals have been to develop materials that will 1) give students information about the United States, 2) interest students in reading English, 3) help students improve their reading skills, and 4) expose students to a variety of literary forms.

7) Members of this project are Vincent Broderick, Barbara Fujiwara, Michiko Inoue, Kenji Kitao, S. Kathleen Kitao, Hideo Miyamoto, and Leslie Sackett.

At first, we met once or twice a month to discuss what constitutes good reading materials, what we should teach about American culture, what students are interested in, what their problems in reading English are, how fast they are able to read, their current English proficiency and so on. We did research on some of these areas. We then wrote and collected reading materials and made exercises for them. We printed the first experimental text, *Am American Sampler*, in March, 1981, and we used it with almost 1,000 students in class over the past school year. With the second JALT research grant, we revised it and added new materials and printed three volumes this past March. Seventeen hundred students are now studying with our second experimental texts, *An American Sampler*, Vols. 1, 2, and 3. In addition to the three volumes, we have supplementary selections, achievement tests, and two reading proficiency tests.

Selecting Reading Materials

Based on our previous studies and experiences, we chose about fifty important and/or interesting areas of culture or life in the United States. They are shown in Appendix A.

We wrote and selected materials and also called for contributions through journals and magazines in Japan and abroad. Collecting materials is very important, because the materials convey cultural information well and we teach most of the cultural information through the main text. Since class hours are about 35 hours or less in 24 classes a year, teachers do not have much time to explain culture in class other than discussing what is in the textbook.

Teachers can use selections which explain some cultural information directly. This is a very easy way to teach culture, but because students are used to reading explanations, we used selections in various literary forms, such as dialogues, directions, newspaper articles, poems, a letter and a movie scenario, as shown in Appendix B. We are hoping that students will learn cultural information indirectly as well as directly.

Students are not used to reading anything except explanations, essays

or narratives, so they are interested in different literary forms.

We have included many pieces of realia, such as recipes, advertisements, brochures, menus, and a wedding program, as shown in Appendix C. Almost none of our students had seen this kind of realia, so at first they had some problems understanding them, but they liked them very much.

In choosing reading materials, we considered students' interests, their needs, meaningfulness to the students, whether the material contained new cultural information, difficulty, bias, and whether material was written in standard English.

In determining difficulty levels of our reading materials, we used our teaching experiences, feedback from our students, difficulty of vocabulary, length of reading passages, and complexity of sentences. Most selections have between 200 and 1,000 words and more than half of them, between 200 and 600 words, so that students can read a passage at least three times in class. We tried to limit new words to less than five percent of the total number of words. We rewrote very long, complicated sentences into easier sentences.

The arrangement of reading materials in the textbooks is, generally speaking, from easy to difficult and from concrete to abstract. We tried not to have very similar readings in the same volume, and to put a variety of literary forms in each volume.

Ideas for Teaching Culture

Since Japanese students have a tendency to translate English passages into Japanese and then understand them, we put definitions for difficult expressions and words. We used a 4,800 word list for Japanese junior and senior high school students. We also defined any expressions based heavily on culture. Most Japanese students think that reading English is finding a Japanese equivalent for each English word. Thus their major strategy in reading is consulting an English-Japanese dictionary, and they never read the original passage through. They finish the passage before they reach the stage of appreciating the cultural information in it.

Besides having students read each passage at least three times in the class, we designed our text to have students do work related to the passage with the exercises as shown in Appendix D and get more cultural meaning from it. The following are some of the features in *An American Sampler* that we think are important in teaching culture.

"Seeing is believing." Visual aids are important and helpful in teaching culture. Photos, maps, illustrations, drawings, realia, forms, and even outlines are very useful. Students have to visualize concepts from the reading passages. Therefore, we have included as many visual aids as possible. In the three volumes, we included 41 photos, 12 maps, 11 drawings, 1 application form, and 14 other types of visual aids.

These visual aids helped students understand the main text better. Photos, realia, and maps in particular made reading selections more real to students, and made them feel that those readings were more closely related to them.

We included a wedding program, a wedding invitation and some photos of a wedding ceremony. For college students, weddings are very interestng, and such realia and photos made the reading selection more real, so students had more accuate ideas of an American wedding.

In addition to these, we put in some visualization exercises, which require students to find things on maps or in drawings or to draw pictures or fill out forms. We also included outline and chart exercises, in which students arrange information. Students like such activities and these kinds of exercises keep students more active in the class. They can also find out by themselves how well they understand the reading passage. These activities reinforce cultural information in the reading passage.

Students liked experience-based activities. They liked particularly "Favorite Pancakes." During summer vacation, I assigned students to make pancakes at home using this recipe and write a report on their experience. It was very easy for students to find out whether they had read right or wrong. If their pancakes turned out good, they had read right, and if not, they had made a mistake.

The students wrote reports and many of them mentioned that this was

the most interesting experience they had ever had in learning English. Classroom situation is entirely different from the real world. For most students, reading English did not make much sense. If they misunderstood, they were probably told by their teachers they were wrong, or they got lower grades on exams. That was all. However when they do activities, if they misunderstand, they get bad results. This is very real. Students enjoyed menus and advertisements for apartments. They had to understand before they order or decide which apartment to rent.

Role playing is also useful. There are dialogues, interviews and skits in the books. Students enjoy role playing. They also learn to understand feelings and express them. Most students have never learned that language is alive. For them, it is just a series of words. If they pay more attention to dialogues, they learn different ways of expressing themselves, different ways of communication. Also, dialogues usually contain much cultural information.

Some songs are included and students can learn to sing songs. This is more interesting than memorizing passages.

Measnrement using the system used in the United States is a serious problem for Japanese students because that system is quite different from the metric system. We iucluded some conversion exercises.

We also included some culture exercises. These can be used for individual research or group research. Students go to the library and find information on certain cutlural items or compare and contrast certain aspects of the United States and Japan. They bring reports back to the class. We sometimes had discussions on them.

In order to avoid passive reading, we included discussion or writing exercises at the end of some selections, so that the students would have an opportunity to express themselves. They cannot do this without understanding the main texts. This helps them with value clarification or discussing cultural differences.

At the beginning of *An American Sampler*, we recommended that students do the following in order to learn American culture and improve their reading in English.

1. Open your mind to a different culture and way of life.
2. Try to be aware of the differences in literary forms and personal writing styles.
3. Use the visual aids to help you understand what you are reading about.
4. Try to read without translation.
5. Try to use an English-English dictionary.
6. Use the exercises to help you understand the main text.
7. Time yourself whenever you read a selection, and keep a record of your reading speed.
8. Do further study on American culture and culture exercises by yourself.
9. Do as much additional reading in English as possible in order to further improve your reading ability.

Feedback from Students and Teachers

We gave a questionnaire to 281 students at the end of the course. One hundred sixty-four students thought that the content of *An American Sampler* was interesting. Two hundred thirty-five students mentioned that the content was unfamiliar to them, and thirty-six, that half of the content was unfamiliar. Ninety-one students said that reading English became interesting because of this text. Two hundred twenty-eight students thought that *An American Sampler* was different from other college readers. One hundred eighty-six students mentioned that content of this text is more interesting than that of other textbooks, and 24 said the opposite. As for the difficulty level of our text, we could not find any charateristic results compared with other college texts. However, students tended to feel that our textbook was a little easier than other college reading textbooks.

Last year seven teachers used *An American Sampler*. One of them had never been to the United States and told me that he was not interested in the United States. After using our textbook in his class, he traveled in

the United States for six weeks last summer. Another teacher went to the United States in March of last year and visited all the places described in *An American Sampler*. Another teacher visited all the restaurants memtioned in "Eating Out," a reading which describes some restaurants in San Francisco. I received favorable feedback from all the teachers who used this textbook. The same teachers are using the second experimental edition in addition to four new teachers. So I am sure that teachers enjoyed using *An American Sampler*.

APPENDICES

A. Areas of American Culture & Life

geography
history
sports
movies
education
food
events
religion
vacation
leisure
politics
TV
ceremonies
the family
housing
social welfare
alternative life style
social mobility
social problems
the telephone
shopping
sex roles
time
space
banking
humor
folklore
communication styles
community activities
nonverbal communication
literature
transportation
superstition
music
holidays
ceremonies
customs
measurements
shopping
postage
letters
money
drink
nicknames
meals
forms of address

B. Literary Forms

essays
directions
explanations
dialogues
interviews
newspaper articles
a newspaper column
a letter
poems
fiction
narratives
brochures
guides
examples of spoken language
a biography
a research paper
a movie scenario

C. Realia

recipes
menus
a wedding program
advertisements
a page from *TV Guide*

a wedding invitation

brochures

D. Types of Exercises

skimming exercise
true/false questions
comprehension questions
close exercise
chart exercise
organization exercise
outline exercise
reference exercise
correction exercise
visualization exercise
sentence completion exercise
interpretation exercise
summary exercise
conversation questions
writing exercise
discussion questions
culture exercise
vocabulary exercise
further study